

8 COMMENTARY ON MACAULAY'S
HISTORY

he says, and yet again : '*I cannot settle to work while the Delhi affair is undecided/*'¹

This being Macaulay's nature, the overthrow of Sir Robert Peel's government in June 1846, which brought him into office again, must have been a serious interruption. He became Paymaster General, and though his official duties were light and he did not often speak in Parliament, the loss of his seat at Edinburgh in July 1847 was an event for which the readers of the History ought to be thankful.

The first two volumes of the History were published in November 1848. They contained the introduction and the reign of James II. Thirteen thousand copies were sold in four months, and Macaulay was startled by his own success.

Of such a run I had never dreamed. But I had thought that the book would have a permanent place in our literature ; and I see no reason to alter that opinion. Yet I feel extremely anxious about the second part. Can it possibly come up to the first ? Does the subject admit of such vivid description and such exciting narrative ? Will not the judgment of the public be unduly severe ? All this disturbs me. Yet the risk must be run ; and whatever art and labour can do shall be done.²

It deserves noting that his success instead of making him content to do as well as he had done was

an incentive
to doing better. He was more careful, more
laborious,
more eager to produce something of lasting
value, which
might be a permanent part of English
literature. One
result was the formation in 1849 of a
systematic plan of
work for the reign of William III.

¹ Ibid. p. 434.

² Journal, Jan. 27, 1849. Ibid. p. 248,